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Libby awaits EPA listing for

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LIBBY — With wood stoves the likely culprit, the Libby area is on track to be the only site in the western United States outside of California to be listed as a non-attainment area under new federal clean air standards.

Lincoln County sanitarian Ron Anderson discussed the pending listing with county commissioners last week.

The area has failed to meet required levels for annual

average concentrations of particulate matter under new, more stringent standards.

Gov. Judy Martz is required to declare the area for listing by the Environmental Protection Agency on Feb. 15. The list will be published in July.

The EPA and state officials will have from July until December to negotiate the final boundary for the non-attainment designation, which is expected to be confined to the greater Libby area.

Listings will be finalized in December and a control plan must be adopted within three

years. The EPA will have one year to review the plan, which would then go into effect in December 2008.

"You have time to plan for it and make the changes," Anderson said.

Those changes could include a ban on all wood stoves not certified by the EPA, Anderson said.

The Libby area is already listed as a noncompliance area under older standards that deal with larger particles.

Because of that listing, restrictions were placed on road sanding and newly

installed wood stoves were required to be EPA-certified. Existing noncertified stoves are allowed under a permit system.

Since those restrictions were put into place, the area has not exceeded the older standards, Anderson said. Voluntary compliance with the wood-stove restrictions has been a success, he said.

"There was a lot of education that went out, telling people what to do in order to be able to keep these things," he said.

The University of Montana Center for Environmental

poor air quality

Health Sciences is studying Libby's latest problem and will issue a final report in September, Anderson said.

The report has already shown that the particulate matter contains organic carbon, which could result from the burning of fuel oil, gasoline, wood or coal, Anderson said.

The final report will provide a more definite answer.

For now, the assumption is that wood stoves are the source of the problem, Anderson said.

The UM study shows that

nonattainment periods have mainly been in the winter, with some spikes during the forest fire season. No significant improvement was seen when first the veneer dryer and then the boiler went offline at the Stimson mill.

"Typically it's a winter issue," Anderson said.

The county had asked Martz to ask the EPA for an extension in the listing of Libby to allow for the completion of the UM study, but the agency has indicated that no such delays will be considered, Anderson said.